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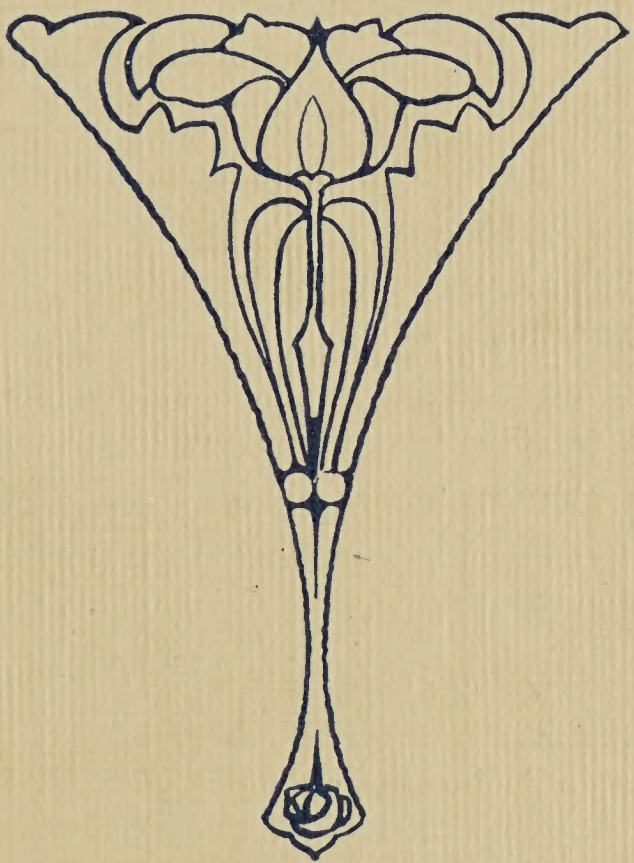
What is Back of It All?



John R. Mott

What is Back of It All?

"What is back of it all?" was the question of a guardsman on the Mexican border the other day as he saw the prompt, efficient and comprehensive way in which the Young Men's Christian Association had risen to its opportunity and had planted a chain of forty buildings along more than one thousand miles of the boundary, equipped them with facilities for ministering to the comfort and profit of the troops, and manned the enterprise with one hundred and fifty capable workers. The same question arises in the minds of others when first confronted with this Movement which is manifesting itself in so many different forms and adaptations in its service for men and boys the world over. At the beginning of a new year, with its limitless possibilities for larger and better things in the life of the Associations, it is well that we, its members and friends, make this guardman's question our own. As we apply and press the question with

reference to the past and the present, may it not reveal the secret of a far richer, more productive, and more helpful future?

Why have Young Men's Christian Associations been planted in nearly 3,000 centers in North America? Why have over 700,000 young men rallied to their membership? What has made these societies a principal factor in influencing for good the ideals and habits of millions of the youth of the present and the preceding generation? Why has the Association become one of the recognized educational movements of our day? Why has it won a unique place in the development of the physical life and efficiency of boys, young men, and women of middle age?

What has led discerning men and women of means to invest in Association buildings and building funds in North America alone $100,000,000, and why have these sums increased decade by decade almost at a geometrical rate? Why have the rich, and those of small income as well, come to the support of this institution with increasing sums from year to year until they now supply annually for current expenses over $14,000,000? What ex-

plains the fact that railroad companies and industrial corporations have devoted over $6,000,000 from their regular funds for permanent equipment for these Associations at work among their employes? Why do the workingmen themselves give to the same cause out of all proportion to their relative ability?

What is there about this Movement which has attracted more than 125,000 railway men into its ranks? What has attached 75,000 students and professors to the Association and made this organization the great fact in the religious life of our colleges and universities? What has made the Association such a power among negro young men in the shaping of character, in the raising up of leaders for the colored people, and in promoting right race relationships that one of the most eminent Hebrew citizens of the nation has devoted hundreds of thousands of dollars to providing buildings for negro young men in connection with this Christian institution in our principal cities? Why have the War and Navy Departments of the Government and the military and naval officers of our forces given every facility for furthering this

work among the men in both arms of the service?

Why have the leaders of virtually every nation now at war welcomed the cooperation of the North American Associations on behalf of the tens of millions of men in the training camps, in the reserve camps, in the trenches, in the hospitals and in the prisoner-of-war camps? What led the missionaries, the civilians, and the government officials throughout the non-Christian world to appeal for the help of this particular organization, so that as a result it has within less than a generation been transplanted from our shores to nineteen countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America? Why in the pathway of the work of the Associations has the Christward movement among young men and boys increased in volume? Why do the leaders of the churches regard the Young Men's Christian Association as such an indispensable servant? Again in the words of the guardsman, "What is back of it all?"

Back of this wonderful progress and achievement lies the deep and clear conviction of men who have studied the facts about the life of young men, that

the Young Men's Christian Association is peculiarly fitted to meet their needs and to develop, conserve, and call into helpful action their powers.

The careful thought and attention of thousands of the ablest laymen have been devoted through the various local, state, and national boards and committees to the supervision of these Associations. No organization of modern times has so pooled the leading and productive brains of the day for the study of its problems and the guidance of its affairs. What does it not owe to the counsel and suggestion of men of organizing and administrative genius and skill?

The Association, as its name implies and as its history shows, is a product of team work and team play. Its members have exemplified a rare power to cooperate. The Association has blended in common effort the most active, progressive, and fraternal men of all the churches. There is no team work like that of a group or a body of men who have lost themselves in some great cause. This makes possible results in the influencing of a community or a nation which would be absolutely impossible were these men to confine

themselves to working in separate detachments.

The unselfish use of money has been a potent factor in the achievement of the Association Movement. What is money? It is stored up personality. Think of what a force has been released and put to work through the many millions devoted to this object. What use of money could be more productive than that of relating it to the plans which have to do with determining the character, activity, and destiny of the young men of a nation. Can we wonder that men and women have been willing to give Association buildings for this work at home and abroad, and to assume the support of secretaries to plant and extend the Movement.

"What is back of it all?" The visions, the enthusiasms, the spirit of adventure, the readiness to attack hard things which characterize boyhood and young manhood. Their responsiveness to high duty, their invariable willingness to undertake large projects, and their ability to rise up under the weight of great responsibility, explain why this Movement has been helped rather than hindered by its chief difficulties and its most baffling situations.

The explanation of the achieving power of the Association lies further back than has been thus far indicated. Its unselfish motive and its passion for helpfulness go far to explain the wonderful results. President Wilson, in laying the corner stone of the Association building at Atlantic City, emphasized this principle, "Nothing is more vital to this country than the association of men together in things that are not for private interests. No man ever organized a Young Men's Christian Association for his own benefit. No man ever expected, if he were a true man, to make a spiritual profit out of it. Because if you try to do good to other men for your own sake, you don't do it for them. The only thing that can vitalize a great association like this is for men to forget themselves and try to serve others." It has been the working of this vital principle which explains the great creative power of the men who have most influenced the character and spirit of the Movement.

"What is back of it all?" The Christian Church. It should ever be held in prominence that the springs of the Young Men's Christian Association are in the churches.

Back, back of all stands the Lord Jesus Christ—the Fountain Head of all vital or life-giving energy. All in the Young Men's Christian Association that is enduring, all that is truly multiplying, all that has had or still has transforming and world-conquering power is traceable to Him. Back of the vast numbers and the mighty organization, back of the money power and the power of human personality, back of gifts of leadership of committees and secretaries, back of the strategy and the statesmanship, back of the wonderful volume of human devotion and activity—in its true relation to the Living Christ is the secret of all that is best in the life of the Young Men's Christian Association. As we face the coming years, we do well to remember that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In proportion to the reality and intimacy of the relation existing between the leaders and members of the Associations and their Divine Lord will be the productive power and spiritual outreach and influence of the Association Movement.